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Approved For Release 2004/06/14 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000400090006-9

21 December 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger  
Assistant to the President for  
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : President Thieu's Attitude and Probable Behavior  
with Respect to a Negotiated Settlement

REFERENCE : My 12 December 1972 Cable Sent to You in Paris

1. Mr. Kennedy relayed this morning (21 December) your request for an assessment of President Thieu's current attitude with respect to the whole subject of negotiations and of his probable behavior with regard to cooperating in the implementation of any settlement we may be able to negotiate with Hanoi. Actually, much of this ground was covered in the 12 December message responding to your request from Paris (relayed by General Haig) for a detailed assessment of Thieu's National Assembly speech. When I gave that 12 December memorandum to General Haig, and after we had discussed it, he indicated that he was going to relay it to you in its entirety via some White House back channel. I do not know the number or nomenclature of the cable by which it was sent to you in Paris, but a copy of its text is appended hereto.

2. In this general sphere, there have been two developments since 12 December that are likely to impact on Thieu's attitude or behavior: the resumption of U.S. aerial attacks north of the 20th Parallel (with attendant reseeding of the mines blocking North Vietnam's ports) and General Haig's visit to Saigon.

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3. We have not yet received any sensitive or covert reporting on Thieu's mood since the bombing was resumed, but he obviously will have welcomed this move. His resultant good humor may make him somewhat easier to talk to, but he will not necessarily become more substantively flexible. Instead, he will almost certainly feel that our acceptance of the advisability or necessity of such an action vindicates his earlier negative estimate of Hanoi's "seriousness" or good faith and that, in the event, he was wise not to let himself be stampeded.

4. I cannot profitably comment on the impact of General Haig's visit since I do not know what he said to President Thieu, or vice versa, the contents of President Nixon's letter or those of Thieu's reply. The one reflection we have so far received on the impact of this visit is contained in [redacted] 21 December 1972 -- our Station Chief's report of his 21 December conversation with Prime Minister Khiem. Khiem's comments to senior U.S. officials are always self-serving, but in this instance Khiem's remarks about Thieu and the latter's reactions have the ring of authenticity.

5. Khiem's comments provide a modest measure of independent support for the attached paper's central thesis: that Thieu is probably prepared (at least privately) to be cooperative -- eventually -- on all issues save one. Given his psychology, temperament and political position he cannot and almost certainly will not sign away the GVN's legal right to existence. Khiem covers this point with the somewhat misleading phrase of "the juridical presence of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam." The troops, of course, bother Thieu and he obviously wants them out. The real issue, however, is not the northern troops but the juridical concept of "Vietnam" that defines their status. Thieu cannot, and will not, officially endorse the concept that at this moment in history there is only one Vietnamese state and hence, by definition, North Vietnamese troops in the south are not "foreign." The reasons why this is, and (to Thieu) has to be, a central issue on which Thieu feels he cannot budge are discussed in the attached paper.

[redacted]  
George A. Carver, Jr.

Attachment  
12 December Message for Dr. Kissinger

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